

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Flagship Niagara League Launches Nation's First-Ever  
Great Lakes College Consortium on a Tall Ship**

Erie, Pa – The Flagship Niagara League, an Erie, Pennsylvania non-profit corporation which supports the Flagship Niagara, an historic sailing ship replica, inspected by the US Coast Guard as a Sailing School Vessel, today announced that four colleges and universities in the Erie region have joined together to create the nation's first Great Lakes college consortium for study onboard a tall ship. The Flagship Niagara is owned by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, partially supported by the Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission (PHMC), and based at the Erie Maritime Museum, a PHMC site. The sailing operation is managed through the Flagship Niagara League. The planning process was a collaborative effort between the Flagship Niagara League, and Erie region colleges and universities including: Allegheny College, Meadville, PA; Gannon University, Erie, PA; Mercyhurst College, Erie, PA and Walsh University, North Canton, OH. The eight-month planning process was facilitated by Educational Partner-Ships, based in Newport, RI.

Students from each of the participating institutions will voyage on the Niagara from May 15<sup>th</sup> to June 4<sup>th</sup> 2010. The program will include study of the Great Lakes and Maritime History through a combination of shore-based and shipboard lectures. Each student participating in the course will receive credit from their home institution. Allegheny College history professor, Dr. Ian Binnington will provide the shore-based instruction in Erie, while Great Lakes Historian and Erie Maritime Museum Administrator Walter Rybka, who also serves as Senior Captain of the Flagship Niagara, will provide the ship-based instruction. The course will have a strong emphasis placed on experiential learning rather than focusing on traditional lecture-based learning. Dr. Binnington states, "this is a wonderful opportunity for our students to connect the academic and the experiential, the book history with the 'lived' history of the past".

Participating professors also include: Dr. Robert Allshouse, Gannon University; Dr. Christopher Magoc, Mercyhurst College; and Mr. Ryan Ozar, Walsh University.

Captain Rybka extols the invaluable leadership, communication, and the character building skills that students will gain through participation on the voyage. Rybka states, "While there are significant academic lessons that will be taken away from this experience, students will have an opportunity to learn more about themselves and others while honing their own leadership skills. These are the types of skills that are difficult to teach in the classroom, yet, they are the very attributes that employers want to see in college graduates." Tall Ship voyages instill character skills to such a great extent that Scotland's University of Edinburgh choose to study the phenomenon in 2007. The university's research concludes that the "participants of education under sail experiences" show measurable improvements in social skills. Their findings were published in the report: Allison, P., McCulloch, K., & McLaughlin, P. (2007, June). *The Characteristics and Value of the Sail Training Experience*. Edinburgh, Scotland, United Kingdom: The University of Edinburgh

In order to ensure that the Flagship Niagara course is as accessible to as many students as possible, the program fee for the college students is exactly the same as what a regular trainee would pay on the Flagship Niagara for the same three week period. Caleb Pifer, Managing Director of Educational Partner-Ships asserts “the cost for participating consortium students is unequivocally the most affordable ship-based experience in the country. In fact, students can expect to pay roughly 50% less for this experience than they would for a similar program on the West or East Coast.

Bill Sutton, Executive Director of the Flagship Niagara League summed up the college consortium by stating the following, “The Flagship Niagara League is continually seeking innovative ways to utilize one of our nation’s most unique cultural resources by providing our community with increased opportunities to participate in the Flagship Niagara experience.”

The Flagship Niagara College Consortium was designed to ensure a fully subscribed program and also provide the colleges an opportunity to collaborate without having the sole responsibility of recruiting eighteen students fall on any one college. Each school will work to secure approximately three to four students to ensure a full ship. Joint efforts involving this many institutions are unusual in the Erie/Northwestern Pennsylvania region. According to Gannon University’s President, Dr. Antoine Garibaldi, “The Flagship Niagara College Consortium is an unparalleled partnership that will benefit students not only at Gannon University, but also in northwest Pennsylvania and northeast Ohio. This program is a natural fit for Gannon, as we are continually seeking unique ways to enhance students’ experiential learning. We are proud to be a part of the nation’s very first example of a college consortium onboard a tall ship.”

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